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United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In its resolution 61/113, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it, after consulting with the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

The present report refers to correspondence between the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations regarding actions taken by the Government of Israel in implementing the relevant provisions of the resolution. It also presents the information made available by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA to the Secretary-General on the return of refugees registered with the Agency to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, and additional information provided by the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations.

* A/62/150.

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1. The present report is submitted to the General Assembly in pursuance of paragraph 5 of its resolution 61/113, entitled "Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities", the operative part of which reads:

> *The General Assembly*,
>
> ...
>
> 1. *Reaffirms* the right of all persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities to return to their homes or former places of residence in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967;
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> 2. *Expresses deep concern* that the mechanism agreed upon by the parties in article XII of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements of 13 September 1993 on the return of displaced persons has not been complied with, and stresses the necessity for an accelerated return of displaced persons;
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> 3. *Endorses*, in the meanwhile, the efforts of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to continue to provide humanitarian assistance, as far as practicable, on an emergency basis, and as a temporary measure, to persons in the area who are currently displaced and in serious need of continued assistance as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities;
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> 4. *Strongly appeals* to all Governments and to organizations and individuals to contribute generously to the Agency and to the other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned for the above-mentioned purposes;
>
> 5. *Requests* the Secretary-General, after consulting with the Commissioner-General, to report to the General Assembly before its sixty-second session on the progress made with regard to the implementation of the present resolution.

2. On 8 June 2007, the Secretary-General addressed notes verbales to the Permanent Representatives of Member States, including the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, in which he drew attention to his reporting responsibility under the resolution and requested the Permanent Representative to inform him of any action his Government had taken or envisaged taking in implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolution.

3. In a note verbale dated 16 August 2007, the Permanent Representative of Israel replied as follows:

> At the outset, Israel wishes to note developments on the ground which occurred since the adoption of these resolutions by the General Assembly. With the emergence of a Palestinian government that accepts the three basic principles of the international community — recognizing Israel, renouncing violence and terror, and abiding by previous agreements — there is great potential for progress on an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and the promotion of a political horizon to further the process. Indeed, the events of the past few weeks, among them meetings between senior Israeli and Palestinian officials, attest to this reality.

Despite Hamas' deliberate and cynical terrorist attacks on the very crossing points used to enable the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, Israel has made major efforts to keep these crossing points open in coordination with the United Nations and its specialized agencies. Indeed since 19 June 2007, more than 50,000 tons of humanitarian aid have been transferred through the Sufra crossing, and more than 4,000 tons passed through the Kerem Shalom crossing.

Additionally, during Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, Israel immediately responded to calls by United Nations agencies and personnel for safe passage into Israel to escape the chaos and violence.

Israel would like to see the crossing points open for the transfer of commercial merchandise in and out of the area but this is particularly difficult due to continuing rocket and mortar attacks against the crossing points.

Israel supports the humanitarian mission of UNRWA and recognizes its important contribution to the welfare of the Palestinian refugees. While Israel believes that UNRWA could be an important vehicle to promote peace and stability in the region it remains concerned with politicization of UNRWA. Israel holds that any resolution adopted regarding UNRWA must deal solely with its operations and avoid extraneous political issues introduced to single out one country, prejudice decisions regarding permanent status negotiations, and promote the interests of one side of the conflict.

Israel is in favour of consolidating UNRWA resolutions and removing any extraneous political language. This is consistent with the general efforts aimed at the reform and revitalization of the work of the General Assembly.

Israel looks forward to continuing its cooperation and working relationship with UNRWA. Accordingly, Israel urges the Secretary-General and UNRWA to consider, together with the parties involved, ways in which the organization can enhance the fulfilment of UNRWA's mandate in an accountable and responsible manner in the best interests of those whom it has been charged to serve.

4. In a note verbale dated 2 August 2007, the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations replied in respect of resolution 61/113:

In resolution 61/113, "Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities", the Assembly, inter alia, "reaffirms the right of all persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities to return to their homes or former places of residence in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967". Regrettably, Israel, the occupying Power, has not respected this right and has not complied with the mechanism agreed upon by the parties in the 1993 Declaration of Principles for a return of the displaced persons. In resolution 61/113, the Assembly expresses concern about this issue and stresses the necessity for an accelerated return of displaced persons. In this connection, it is also important to refer to the Assembly's endorsement of the Commissioner-General's efforts to provide humanitarian assistance, on an emergency basis and as a temporary measure, to persons in the area who are currently displaced and in need of assistance, and to underscore the appeal made by the Assembly for Governments, organizations and individuals to contribute to UNRWA to meet their continuing needs.

5. In connection with paragraph 2 of General Assembly resolution 61/113, the Secretary-General has obtained from the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) the information available to her on the return of refugees registered with the Agency. As indicated in previous reports on the subject, the Agency is not involved in any arrangements for the return of refugees, nor is it involved in any arrangements for the return of displaced persons who are not registered as refugees. Its information is based on requests by returning registered refugees for transfer of their UNRWA registration records from Jordan, Lebanon or the Syrian Arab Republic to the areas to which they have returned. The Agency would not necessarily be aware of the return of any registered refugees who did not request the transfer of their registration records. So far as is known to the Agency, from 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007, 2,220 refugees registered with UNRWA returned to the West Bank and 249 to the Gaza Strip from places outside the occupied Palestinian territory. It should be noted that some of these may not have been displaced in 1967 but may have been displaced in earlier or later years or may be members of the family of a displaced registered refugee. Thus, taking into account the estimate given in paragraph 3 of the previous report (A/61/358), the number of displaced registered refugees who are known by the Agency to have returned to the occupied territories since June 1967 is about 29,003. The Agency is unable to estimate the total number of displaced inhabitants who have returned. It keeps records only of registered refugees and, as noted above, even those records, particularly with respect to the location of registered refugees, may be incomplete.

6. In connection with paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 61/113, the Secretary-General refers to the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2006[1] and to the previous reports of the Commissioner-General for accounts of the continuous and ongoing assistance provided by UNRWA to persons displaced and in need of continued assistance.

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-second Session, Supplement No. 13* (A/62/13).